

will take care of themselves. The personnel of the hospital service is of vastly greater moment than the development of buildings or of luxury of equipment.

READING FOR THE SICK

BY JOSEPHINE KULZICK

Assistant in the Milwaukee Public Library

"GIVE me something cheerful and entertaining; it's for a sick person."

Every attendant in a public library becomes more or less familiar with this request. It is made daily. Something cheerful! Everybody wants it, even those who are well. The demand is so insistent that the purveyors of humor ought to have no difficulty in disposing of their wares, for to most people humor represents the very essence of cheer and they turn to it instinctively when seeking literary entertainment for themselves or others.

And yet, strange as it may seem, considering how our presses creak and groan with the burden laid upon them, in the matter of cheery books or purely humorous writing there remains a wide gap between supply and demand. Good mirth-provoking literature is not easy to find. The easiest books to read are always the hardest to write, and the refreshing gift of humor is a thing quite apart from literary skill. It is a quality, an atmosphere, too elusive to be caught, else our enterprising scribblers would scarcely allow this dearth to exist.

Among the yearly output of books foisted on an innocent public there is always a substantial quota labeled "humor;" but most of it is poor stuff unworthy the name. It is forced, vapid, and utterly lacking in the essence and spontaneity of the genuine article. The counterfeit is so obvious that few readers are either deceived or amused.

A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the wisest men;

but the nonsense must bear some sort of relation to sense or it has no point, no significance. Real humor is nothing but wisdom enjoying a lark. To be a great humorist one must be something of a philosopher.

A book may be exceedingly humorous, however, without being the least bit cheerful, and vice versa. It may be humorous in its irony and pathetic in its truth; or it may be pathetic in its efforts to be amusing and humorous in its failure. What sick people need is some-

thing soothingly diverting rather than hilariously funny. The humor that would send a person in good health and spirits into gales of uproarious laughter may not tickle even faintly the risibles of one in disease. The normal and abnormal view points are different; it can not be otherwise.

The substance of the ideal book for the sick will be of a light entertaining character, easy to follow and easy to forget. It may stimulate gently but should neither excite nor depress for any tension of emotion or suspense may be productive of ill effects. Sick people are peculiarly susceptible to impressions and for this reason it is very important that nothing of a grewsome, tragic or problematical nature be presented to their minds. They have no force to spend in mental agitations.

As an example of the sort of fiction not to put into the hands of a nervous patient I might cite that admirable and absorbing little novellette "Amos Judd" by Mitchell, which so excited a reader recovering from nervous prostration that it brought on an attack of palpitation of the heart. It might not affect another reader in this way but it is better to take no chances.

Short stories, I think, are best, such as Stockton's "A Piece of Red Calico," "His Holiday in Bed," and those of similar character. Novels, unless read in brief installments, are apt to be too fatiguing. Certainly those of any length should be avoided, except, perhaps, where the patient is well along on the road to recovery.

It is not necessary, however, to make one's selection from the swollen stream of fiction. There are other lines of reading fully as entertaining and far more profitable. Delightful books of travel, beautifully illustrated—another source of diversion for the invalid; biographies dealing with the real affairs of real people, often in a fascinating way; and the whole range of literature proper, drama, letters, essays and the rest.

Of course much depends on the taste and culture of the reader. What one person enjoys hugely another will find utterly flat. For instance, one familiar enough with historic characters to remember the roles they played in the world's history would find "The Houseboat on the Styx" by Bangs exceedingly diverting while a reader without that knowledge would just as surely be bored. Those who have formed a taste for work of the Laura Jean Libby or Dare Devil Dick type will find anything from the legitimate field of literature tame and uninteresting at first.

Of the shorter novels I should recommend such stories as Mrs. Wiggins' "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," "A Cathedral Courtship,"

and the fresh and buoyant "Penelope" stories. These latter are particularly delightful, combining as they do the human interest of a work of fiction with the descriptive touches of a book of travel. Anything Mrs. Wiggins writes is likely to be entertaining.

Ford's "Wanted a Chaperone;" Hoyt's "Misdemeanors of Nancy;" Harland's "The Cardinal's Snuff Box;" Tarkington's "Monsieur Beaucaire;" Allston's "Her Boston Experiences;" "A Romance in Transit" by Lynde; "One Summer" by Blanche Howard; "In the Cheering-up Business" by Lee; "Kitty of the Roses" by Barbour; "Blix" by Frank Norris; "On the Firing Line" by Ray; "Tryphena in Love" by Raymond; "Minerva's Manœuvres" by Loomis; "A Literary Courtship" by Fuller; "The Romance of an Old Fool" by Roswell Field; "Geoffrey Strong" by Laura E. Richards; and "The Making of a Marchioness" by Mrs. Burnett are all light and bright enough to answer our purpose.

Then there is the inimitable "David Harum" by Westcott; "Butternut Jones" by Tilford; "The Fugitive Blacksmith" by Stewart; "Colonel Carter of Cartersville" by F. Hopkinson Smith; and the works of J. C. Lincoln, all of which will appeal particularly to men. "The Duet" by Conan Doyle, which takes a young couple through the first year of their married life and then leaves them to their fate after the arrival of their first baby; the somewhat similar "Story of a Baby" by Ethel Turner; "Emma Lou" by Mary Mears; "Doctor Zay" by Mrs. Phelps; "Rudder Grange" by Stockton,—in fact any of his novels; and Mrs. Sidgwick's "Cynthia" stories are all worthy of mention in this connection.

The bachelor maid not wholly dissatisfied with her estate ought to find some enjoyment and appreciation in the pages of "Under My Own Roof Tree" by Adelaide Rouse, a story of middle life with a thoroughly middle age flavor about it. Not a remarkable book in any particular but one entirely readable, and conventional only in that the heroine has been equipped with the two customary lovers one of whom she properly marries in the end. Written in the first person, it reads more like autobiography than fiction. Perhaps it is. There is a saying that in fiction everything is true but the names, while in history it is just the reverse.

Lillian Bell's "Love Affair of an Old Maid" is equally interesting but does not terminate with a wedding. Another nice, tranquil story about old maids which, to quote an old lady who has outlived her romanticism, "begins without mush and ends without mush" is Mrs. Gaskell's "Cranford." This story will not recommend itself to souls

athirst for ardent love-making, but in "In the Lifting of a Finger" by Ina Brevort Roberts, a clever bit of fiction, the heart interest is intense and sustained throughout.

Most people would probably include in a list of this kind the contagious "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." To me it is not a cheerful book, quite the contrary. The shallow optimism that springs from such crass ignorance as is embodied in Mrs. Wiggs is pathetic in the extreme. Besides, the most heroic figure in the story succumbs to consumption and sick people should not be confronted with the ravages of disease. They do not want to, if they can avoid it, as the plea of one victim, "For God's sake, give me a story without a cough in it" sufficiently proves.

To the short stories already mentioned I would add Bunner's excellent "Short Sixes;" "Pratt Portraits" by Fuller; "Marjorie Daw" by Aldrich; the stories of Ruth McEnery Stuart, especially "The Second Wooing of Selina Sue" and "Napoleon Jackson;" "The Dolly Dialogues" by Anthony Hope; "Cheerful Americans" by Loomis; and for those interested enough in child nature to enjoy reading about it: Josephine Daskam's "The Madness of Philip;" "Helen's Babies" by Habberton; "Emma Lou—Her Book" by Martin; Graham's "Golden Age;" Crane's "Whilomville Stories;" Annie Hamilton Donnell's "The Very Small Person;" and Myra Kelly's unmatchable "Little Citizens."

For those interested in the theater no book will be found more thrilling than Clara Morris's "Life on the Stage." It sweeps one along from cover to cover. While "The Autobiography of a Newspaper Girl," by Elizabeth Banks, has at least one chapter that will raise a laugh in any one and is crisp and breezy all through. "The Making of an American" by Jacob Riis is delightful in its frank simplicity, and Madame d'Arblay's "Diary and Correspondence" though somewhat lengthy has been pronounced "a book for the bedside, and for occasional hours, either of relaxation or convalescence."

Nature lovers will find refreshment in the pages of Thoreau, Burroughs, Long, Seton-Thompson, Torrey and a score of others. "Flowers of the Pave" by Skinner, and Mabie's idyllic "Under the Trees" should not be overlooked, nor the literary garden books such as "Elizabeth and her German Garden," "A Solitary Summer," and "The Garden of a Commuter's Wife" published anonymously; "An Old Country House" by Le Gallienne; "An Island Garden" by Celia Thaxter; "My Summer in a Garden" by Warner and many others which will be found on the shelves of almost any public library.

Of the lighter poets who have made a name in their chosen field are Austin Dobson, James Whitecomb Riley, Eugene Field, Sam Walter Foss, Ben King, J. C. Lincoln, Oliver Herford, and Carolyn Wells. In the department of humor we have "Four Hundred Laughs," "Bulls and Blunders," "The Joe Miller Jest Book,"—the parent of all our jokes; the farces of Howells and Bangs; "The Comic History of England" by Nye; "Three Men in a Boat," "Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow," and "On the Stage and Off," by Jerome; and the various works of Mark Twain and Max O'Rell.

Harris's "Uncle Remus" and Marietta Holley's "Samantha" stories have entertained scores of readers, as have also "Dream Life" and "The Reveries of a Bachelor" by Mitchell. In the essay line there are the admirable works of Agnes Repplier; "Imaginary Obligations" by Colby; "Lucid Intervals" by Martin; "The Gentle Reader" by Carruthers; and "The Spinster Book" by Myrtle Reed who recently abandoned sphinsterhood. "The Letters Of a Self-made Merchant to his Son" by Lorimer belongs in a class all by itself and has found, as yet, no successful imitator. It is witty and full of practical common sense but is thoroughly pervaded with commercial spirit. Its sequel is just as good or better.

Every one interested in music and musicians ought to make acquaintance with the charming collection of letters published under the rather formidable title of "Music Study in Germany" by Amy Fay. Miss Fay—a sister-in-law of the late Theodore Thomas—came in intimate personal touch with many celebrities of the day and she was keenly alive to their many eccentricities. These letters were not intended for publication and they give the details of her life among the Germans as only a clever girl gives them when writing unreservedly to her friends.

Of commendable books of travel there is no end; but as this list has grown so long already a few titles in this class will have to suffice. "An American Girl in London" and "A Social Departure" by Mrs. Coates; "A Girl in the Carpathian Mountains" by Menie Muriel Dowie; "The West from a Car Window" by Richard Harding Davis; "As Seen by Me" and "Abroad with the Jimmies" by Lillian Bell; the books of Clifton Johnson and of Mrs. Alec Tweedie; Kate Sanborn's "A Truthful Woman in California," "Adopting an abandoned Farm" and "Abandoning an Adopted Farm;" and last but not least the illustrated lectures of John Stoddard and Burton Holmes. These are deservedly popular with the reading public but they have one serious objection: their size and weight.